Podcast - Economic climate

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Hello, everyone. My name is Leanne Bennett and welcome to another episode of the blind spot. Today we are discussing employment and the economic climate 2020 was a really tough year for the economy due to the impact of COVID-19, with many people being made redundant, and businesses closing. And as that stands at the start of 2021, the economy is still in a similar position.

Understandably, this is a worrying time for a lot of people. But there's a lot of support out there. Today, I'm joined by Martin Sigsworth senior employment manager at TPT. Martin will be discussing TPT’s employment service and will be providing useful information, advice and tips for blind and partially sighted people who are out of work.

Hi, Martin, welcome to the podcast.

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Hi, Leanne. Thanks for having me.

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So to begin with, could you tell us a little bit about your role at TPT?

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Yeah, absolutely. So as you said, I'm the senior employment manager at Thomas Pocklington Trust, I've been working in the employment field for about five years now. My main responsibilities are -I manage our internship program, which provides paired work placement opportunities for blind and partially sighted people. I also oversee our coaching offer for people who have been made redundant or a risk of redundancy. And I also lead on designing new services in the employment space for blind and partially sighted people as well,

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As a blind person yourself, what challenges did you face seeking employment? And how did you overcome that?

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Yes, so I've been working roughly now for 15 years. But it did certainly take me a little bit of time to get my first opportunity. When I graduated from uni, I assumed that it'd be, it'd be quite easy for me to, you know, to find work and start working straight away. But that wasn't the case, friends and things like that, I'd been able to pick up little bits of work experience throughout that time at uni, which could then draw upon when it comes to interviews and look for work when we when we all graduated. But unfortunately, I didn't have the experience of every kind of example, which I was using was related to university work and not the kind of real work experience. And then, you know, as my career progressed, it's things like, you know, making sure that my application forms are well formatted, well formatted with being totally blind, it can sometimes be difficult to know, you know, know if the formatting has changed on an application form as you're entering it. So I've had to get people to kind of double check my applications before I've sent them off. Also, take a look at my CV to make sure that that looks okay. And things like that to you know, just to make sure that you are painting yourself in the best possible light, because in a competitive labor market, recruiters are looking for any excuse to narrow down the amount of applicants they've got. So making sure that the fundamentals array is you know, is really important. And that's what I've always concentrated on. And then when I kind of get to interview on, I'm always fairly confident at that point that my skills and abilities and experience can see me through. And if they don't, you know, that's t maybe because there was a better candidate out there. If I suspect it's because of my visual impairment, then I think of it as experience and just think that that that probably wasn't an employer or a line manager that I would have wanted to work for a long term anyway. So just kind of be resilient to them, you know, to them. knockbacks and, and not always thinking it's done to be in a blind candidate, but just that there might be a better candidate out there for that role.

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And as we know, 2020 was really tough for the job market due to COVID-19. How do you feel the worsening economic climate will impact on blind and partially sighted people?

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Yeah, as you say last year was a particularly tough year. We saw our unemployment go up across the, you know, across the general public. There's been some data released today from the Office for National Statistics, which kind of shows the, what the impact of Coronavirus has been on the labor market over the past three months. So, unemployment in the UK is currently 5% which is the equivalent of 1.7 million people being out of work. Now that's the highest it's been since the economic crash of two 2008 2009. So obviously, the knock on effect for blind and partially sighted people is an already competitive labor market is becoming increasingly competitive, blind or partially sighted people that were in work, are at risk of losing their jobs. And if they haven't already done so, due to redundancy and things like that. And we've also, there's also 4.5 million people on furlough at the moment. And when, you know, inevitably, when that scheme is wrapped up, we're going see more fallout from that, because that's providing a bit of a safety net for employees at the moment, which you know, is likely not to exist. Well, while we know it's not going to exist forever. So we could easily see unemployment within the UK rise to six 7%

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Yeah, absolutely. it's scary. So what type of support does the Employment Service provides to, those blind and partially sighted people who are out of work because of the pandemic?

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For those who've been affected particularly by the pandemic, so have lost have lost their jobs due to do to Coronavirus or, have just lost the job within the last 12 months or are facing redundancy or currently on furlough and looking at what their options are moving forwards. In November, we launched a professional career coaching service. Now this is for people who've recently found themselves at risk of redundancy or being made redundant, or has a say, currently off, or when one should what their next steps might be.

We know again, from the data which has been released today that 14 in every 1000 people who are in work in the UK at the moment are facing redundancy. So we know that there's going to be blind and partially sighted people who are in that boat as well. Data provided by Citizens Advice Bureau also suggests that people with disabilities are twice as likely to be on furlough or facing redundancy then the non-disabled people. So when we look at our client group, you know, blind or partially sighted people, the chances are is that there's going to be people in that boat at the moment that have arrived, facing redundancy be made redundant or at furlough. And I'm wondering what their options are moving forward. So we've partnered with the Center for resolution, to offer some professional coaching sessions to these individuals, to guide them through this kind of journey.

People might be looking at making a career change, might want to career change, maybe haven't even had to look for work for a long time and need to kind of get to grips with that and get some practical goals and actions in place. And send us a resolution there coaches will work with our candidates to you know, to take them through that to discuss that and get some really clear goals and action plans in place to help them with the careers moving forward.

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That's great, and what wider employment support does TPT offer?

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Wider than that. We also like to say we do offer internship placements, we've just recently recruited three virtual interns, that we'll be working with us for the next three months. And we're looking at providing more of those opportunities as the progresses. We also have employment advice, which is available online. Or you can contact us and be able to speak to an employment advisor. Now we have things like resources on how to create CV’s. And we have some accessible templates, which people can download to make sure that when they use in these templates that you know everything's formatted correctly. And it's quite easy to complete. Some of the problems that you have with kind of my general CV’s online is not the most accessible for blind and partially sighted people. So we've got a whole host of different CVS which people can download on their on the website. We also have some resources around the complete application forms and the best way to do that, and also how to best prepare for interviews. And like I say if anybody wants on-to-one support, that can be arranged as well with one of our employment advisors.

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What general advice do you have for people out there looking for work?

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So as I was, as I was saying earlier, there are some fundamental things which I think it's important for any person to get right when they're when they're seeking work and applying for work. Now, the first one is to be regularly job searching You know, have a routine where you are looking for roles, you've got alerts set up online, which email you when jobs that are related to the field that you want to apply for come up. And you can do that through all the all the major job sites like of Reed, Indeed, Guardian jobs. And once you've found that job, you need to reduce the risk of your application not making it to the recruiting manager. So it's things like making sure that your application formatted or CV - the spelling is correct. The language that you're using is clear. There are no missing words, because I've worked on the other side of recruitment. And I've been a recruiter, working for a large, large university within the UK. And in my role at TPT as well, I do a fair bit of recruitment. And when you're faced with a number of application forms, or CV’s, recruiters have gotten to be at the moment, the first thing that you do is cut down by looking for mistakes, if somebody put a spelling mistake in there are it's littered with grammatical errors or missing words, that's getting put straight in the bin. Also, that it's tailored for the role that you're applying for. There's no point having a generic CV which you're sending off for every single role because recruiters smell that out in a second. And then if you do get interviews, making sure that you're really well prepared. As I said earlier on, we've got a resource, which gives you some tips and ideas for how to prepare for an interview. But I can't understate that enough that, you know, it's the, it's the key principle that if you if you fail to prepare, then prepare to fail. And I've got years of experience of being interviewed, and also being the interviewer and you can tell the people that have prepared, and you can tell the people that haven't. And you know, a lot of people aren't confident when it comes to interviews. And that's done to kind of lack of experience and lack of practice. So try and practice as much as you can feel free to contact the employment team at Thomas Pocklington Trust centers over the job details. You know, we can arrange a mock interview as well. And we'll give you honest feedback on how you do and give you tips to improve, get the key fundamentals right for job search and apply. And then when you get for interviews as well.

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Great. So earlier, you mentioned the ONS data that was released today. And there was actually some good news to come out with that. Could you tell us about it?

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Yeah, so one of the major things which, you know, one of the green sheets, which did come out of that data, which was released today is that we are starting to see more vacancies become available. So in the last three months, there was an additional 81,000 roles, which were being advertised. And this is something which we've kind of seen across the board as well is that the roles are starting to be advertised. Now, a lot of them are kind of morphic fixed term contracts, particularly in the charity sector, you know, we've seen a lot of kind of tie off on fixed term contracts and things like that. But you know, the roles are out there if people are willing to apply for them. And we've actually seen, you know, we've seen that reflected in our, our pool of candidates as well that we work with. So we've got just had three interns that have come to the end of their internships, and every single one of them is secured further employment, which has been really positive. I also spoke to another individual, just before Christmas, who had previously been self-employed, due to the COVID-19 situation, that business wasn't viable for them anymore. And they were looking at making a career change and working in the sight loss sector. And they actually, you know, put all the steps in place, which they needed to do that started applying for roles. And I found out a few weeks ago that that actually secured a new role working for working for a charity within the sight loss sector, which was really positive. So there are roles out there, you know, people still need jobs doing so there is there is hope out there and people you know, just need to keep on searching and keep on applying and stay positive.

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I think that's really useful advice for any blind or partially sighted person worried about securing employment. And hopefully that's provided some reassurance that there are jobs out there.

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If anybody is wanting further advice or any guidance feel free to contact the employment team. We have an email address, which is employment at Pocklington dash trust org.uk. But yeah, we are hoping that the labor market will start to see a recovery as the year progresses. But it's just really important that people stay in this early and are aware that jobs are out there at the moment and keep on applying.

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Thanks for coming on the show today, Martin.

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Thanks very much Leanne.

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And if you want to find out more about the coaching offer or anything else Martin has mentioned today, you can go to our website and find out more at Pocklington dash trust.org.uk forward slash employment.

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